



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The style of the author is delightful, and is characterized by apt phraseology and pertinent illustration.

BERNARD MUSCIO.

Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, England.

PRACTICAL MYSTICISM. By Evelyn Underhill. London: J. M. Dent, 1914. Pp. xiii, 163.

The conviction that the world has a significance greater than appears on the surface of it, far greater than we can fully understand, is present at times to almost all of us, and lies at the root of the appeal that mysticism makes. The power and sincerity in the writings of the great mystics reinforce that appeal. But their writings are not only undeniably difficult, to most of us there is also something repellent in them. The ordinary student has, therefore, much reason to be grateful to Miss Underhill, whose gifts of exposition are very remarkable and whose sympathy makes light of stumbling blocks. Chief of these to the ordinary reader is the insistence recurrent in many mystical writings on the need for strange states of meditation, remote withdrawals into a region where there is no distinct thought and no definite image whatever.

The plain man would sweep the whole thing aside as morbid, if it were not for a lingering sense that reality is so strange it may be rash to exclude any method of approaching it. But to Miss Underhill the method of the mystics has an indispensable value. According to her summary, if I may put it into my own words, the world has two aspects: one, that of appearance (or "becoming" or "time" or "change"), and the other, that of something beyond all appearances and distinct from them, something which cannot be named unless we chose to name it pure Being or Eternity. In the end, however, these two aspects are realized as fundamentally united so that the complete mystic can return at will from his immersion into the world of eternity to a joyous union with the world of time. But as a necessary stage he must become aware of this "eternal" side, this something over and above all its manifestations, realize that it exists and desire a union with it. "*Non voglio quello che esce da te, ma sol voglio te, o dolce amore*" (quoted from St. Catherine, though not in the little book, but in the larger *Mysticism*, p. 298).

This would seem to imply conceiving the universe after the way some thinkers and some poets, and those of no mean order, have conceived persons, namely, as beings that are more than all their qualities, past, present, or to come.

“These are her gifts, as tongues may tell them o’er:
Speak low her name, my soul, for that says more.”

Perhaps this really is the right conception of the universe, and if so, it is very important, alike for philosophy, religion, art, and ethics, there is certainly much that points in that direction besides the whole body of mystical experience. And such quasi-mystical poems as Shelley’s,

“To the deep, to the deep, down, down!”

All theories of evolution, for example, seem to posit something out of which qualities emerge, itself not qualified, and most theories of creation in art suggest that the standard at which the artist aims, although it is a standard, does not contain the particular lovelinesses as such before they are expressed. Therefore it seems quite possible that, at least for certain natures, the best way of approach to reality may include this peculiar stage in which all definite appearances are as it were blotted out. We are the less prepared to deny this when we remember that Wordsworth, certainly one of the sanest as he was one of the greatest among nature mystics, counted among his highest moments those when the world of ordinary union and ordinary thought fell right away from him. But essentially the same attitude can be and is adopted by others without anything of this experience. Meredith, for example, made Earth say of her peculiar chosen that they must “love more than things of my lap, love me,” and yet Meredith always kept himself “planted in good gross earth,” never out of touch with the pageant of experience. Indeed, if the world of appearance is an essential part of the ultimate reality, there seems no reason why some natures need lose touch with it at all on their way up. Certainly the “blank” stage has peculiar dangers, if also peculiar advantages, and perhaps it is one of the experiences such as those of personal affection that are only valuable when unforced.

The subject of course bristles with difficulties. Not the least of them lies in the supersession of Reason. Miss Underhill does not, perhaps in the limited space at her disposal she could not,

discuss the questions fully, but it calls for such a discussion. Without it an uneasy feeling is left that the abdication of reason is meant to be both blind and complete. "By love he may be gotten and holden, but by thought never" is quoted without comment or modification. It is possible to be told that reason might come to see that for its own completion it needed something that was not strictly speaking reason at all. It is possible to be told that at present we can somehow be aware of realities which we cannot bring fully into our range, but may we not hope that one day we shall? Unless there is some goal of this kind before us it would seem that our Spirit must always be divided against itself.

The thought of the present war gives a deep and poignant interest to the discussion of the "Night of the Soul," that desolation of complete self-sacrifice through which all the mystics pass. In these days when so many are willingly giving up their lives with no hope of immortality we can feel as perhaps never before the greatness in a surrender that asks nothing at all in return, not even an enduring spiritual satisfaction. We are reminded of Sidgwick's feeling that the ignorance of what is to come after death may be the best soil for heroism. Because of that he was prepared to say that, though he believed immortality to be true and necessary to the justice of the universe, he could be content not yet to know its truth. In one of his letters—to Roden Noel Memoirs, p. 338) he writes that while he "could not endure an unjust universe in which Good Absolute was not also good for each," on the other hand he felt "that the *certain knowledge* that justice ruled the universe would preclude the unselfish choice of Good as Good. From this point of view "hope rather than *certainty* is fit for us in this earthly existence. For if we had certainty there would be no room for the sublimest effort of our mental life—self-sacrifice and the moral choice of Good as Good, though not perhaps good for us here and now."

In the little book before us, Miss Underhill shows that the mystics do make just that effort at its hardest and go through a death at least as terrible as the death faced on the battlefield by one who has no thought of "rising again." But with the mystics, as with Sidgwick's hope, the final view does not imply an unjust universe where the brave and noble are annihilated but one where he "who has died with his own attributes wholly into God is sure of eternal life" (p. 128, quoted from Ruysbroeck).

F. MELIAN STAWELL.

London, England.